

HE LIVES ON!

Eleanor Huff

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This portrait of a noble life is a work of art and a work of love
by Eleanor Huff.

It seems impossible, somehow, that anyone who knew him could ever forget him. Or even the ones who only heard about him. So this memorial is not written so that people will say, "Oh, yes, I remember him. He's been dead five years now, hasn't he?" This is simply a remembering of all the things he did, and all the things he was.

His name was Isaac Adelbert Wilson. He was born July 2, 1868, at Chesapeake, Ohio. He died at Brooksville, Florida, on May 16, 1936. The years between were full; they were rather amazing years to the rest of us. They held his loss of sight when he was a small boy in Kansas, and his fight and his victory over that handicap. He was graduated from the State School for the Blind in 1889, when he was twenty-one. When he was twenty-six he entered the ministry, and for forty-two years he served his Lord and his church unceasingly, in various pastorates in Kansas and, finally, in the church at Brooksville, Florida. Early in those years he also found time to lecture on the chautauqua platform. It's indicative of his character that he became well-known as a humorist, rather than a tragedian, in the field of entertainment. It was in those early years, too, that he married a school teacher named Eleanor Arnold.

Because he was conscious of the handicap of his blindness-- although he never allowed other people to become conscious of it-- it was his vision to organize the blind for mutual benefit. Consequently he was the leader in founding the Alumni Association of the School for the Blind, and later, in 1921, the Kansas State Association for the Blind. By virtue of his presidency of the latter, he was the blind member of the State Commission for the Blind.

Those were the things he did -- work of vast benefit to those who shared his own handicap and work in the church for those who needed not physical but spiritual help. They were great things. But when you think of him it's the little things that stick in your memory, and loom large, and become the substance of the man he was.

The children of his friends and relatives will remember that it was more fun to be with him than nearly anybody else. He was always good for a tussle on the floor. He played dominoes with them without ever having to ask how many spots there were. When they asked him for a dime he gave it to them -- and it never turned out to be a penny by mistake. He took them around town unfalteringly, without ever having to ask directions, and they would have been lost without him. He made them

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laugh more often than anybody else. And they grew quite large before they realized that "blind" meant not being able to see -- for he seemed to see as well as anyone else. He took the horror out of blindness for them.

And the grown-ups, his contemporaries -- they will remember that he never embarrassed them with a need for their pity. In fact, he probably needed pity less than any man they ever knew. He stood on his own two feet, he was his own man, and he asked very little of anyone, not even the time of day. He had his own watch, and he could tell you, to the minute. It's true, of course, that he sometimes asked the services of his wife's eyes. But it's doubtful that she ever had to describe or read or tell him anything twice, for he had trained a memory that seemed almost superhuman to those of us who rely upon visual reminders.

When you think of him you remember, perhaps best of all, his unflinching humor. It was the gay sign of his courage and his self-respect, which left no room in him for self-pity. He was the first to laugh and the last to stop when anything funny happened. He had an endless stock of jokes.

You remember that, having been taken over any ground once, he knew it forever after, so that he walked to and from his pulpit alone and unaided, and so that he knew the highways of several states and never got lost even if you did, with roadmaps. You learned it was wisest to follow his directions. You remember that his Bible was the biggest Bible you ever saw -- in more sense than one. It was written in Braille and it seemed to have countless volumes. It amazed his congregations that he apparently read long texts for his sermons each Sunday. In reality he was quoting from memory. It would have amazed people even more if they had known what a large proportion of the Bible he knew by heart.

You remember that he shook hands with his people after church every Sunday morning, and called each one by name. And you remember that some of them used to test this uncanny knowledge of his by shaking hands without speaking. He knew them anyway, by the touch of the hand, by some strange insight that the rest of us could never comprehend. It proves what kind of man he was when you remember that sometimes strangers went away not knowing he was blind, and that he made even those who knew him best forget it most of the time.

He had no eyes, but he saw with the sight of his spirit, keener and clearer than ordinary sight. And his seeing was unfailingly kind. During his years he helped others far more than he was helped by anyone. When you remember all these things you decide he must have been a great man, although he never gave you time to ponder that matter when he was alive.

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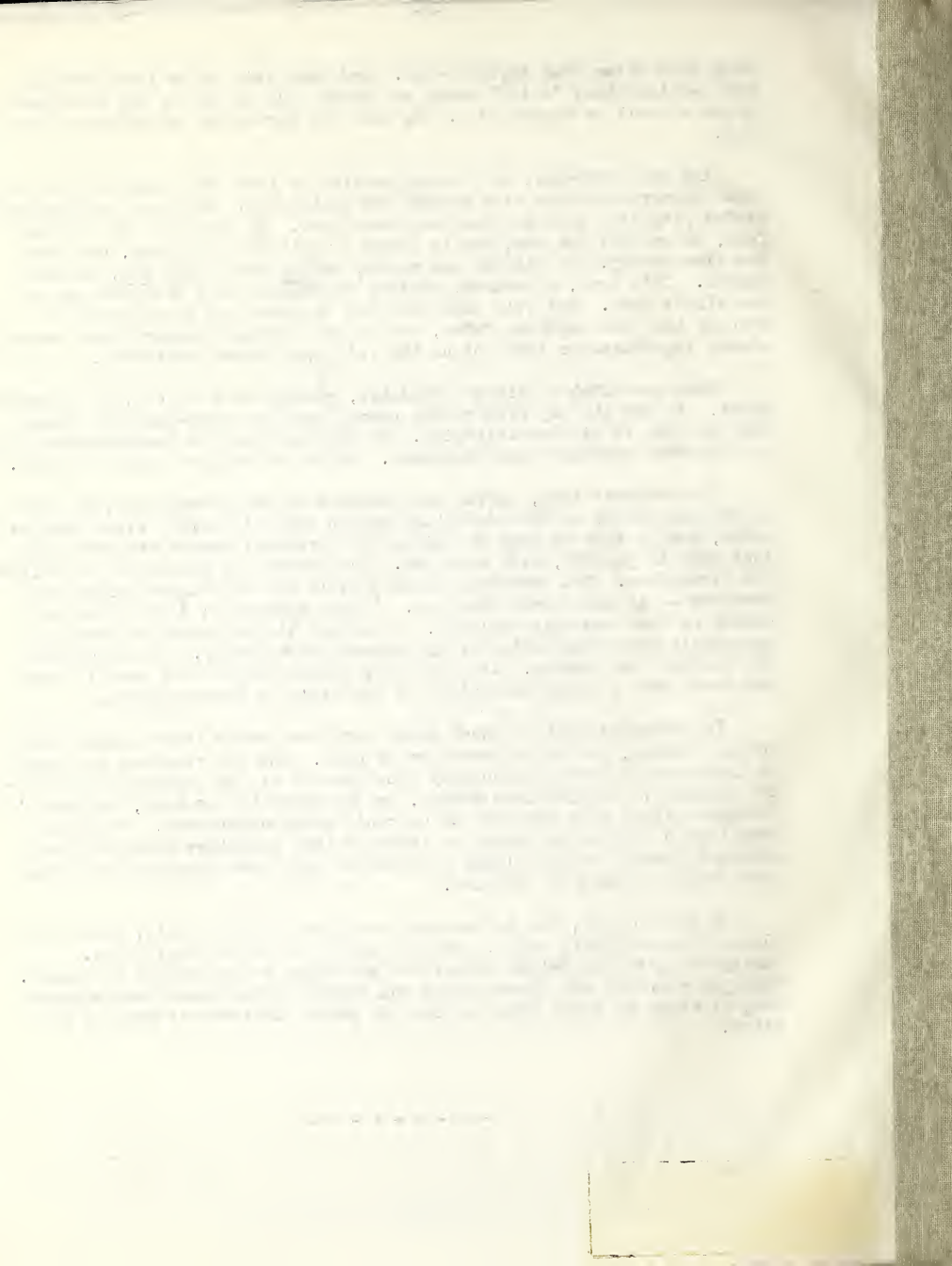
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Eleanor, Huff

AUTHOR

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